Qur'anic Etiquette: Euphemisms

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(حفظه الله)

HAQQ HURTS HYPOCRITES

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

Al-Bukhāri (رحمه الله تعالى) has a chapter called, “باب الحياء في العلم”, *Having Shame in Knowledge*. And he mentions the statement of Mujāhid,

لا يتعلم العلم مستحي ولا مستكبر

“One who's shy will not learn and one who’s arrogant will not learn.”

Because the one who's shy – his shyness will deprive him of learning, and one who’s arrogant – his arrogance will deprive him of learning. Meaning, you need to ask to learn. And ‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها) said,

نعم النساء نساء الأنصار، لم يمنعهن الحياء أن يتفقهن في الدين

“The best of the women are the women of the Ansār (or, how good are the women of the Ansār), shyness didn’t prevent them from attaining the Fiqh in the Dīn.”

And they're Sahabiyyāt, we mentioned examples in our Fiqh class, where they went to the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and specifically asked him about personal intimate matters that they needed to know as part of the Fiqh of their ‘ibādāt. That's the way to go if you need to know something. But at the same time – if the terms can be alluded to, or you can hint to them, or you can mention it explicitly once and then refer to it by hinting to it – then that's a method taken from the Qur’ān. When matters may be bashful, or reprehensible – and one must learn them – Allāh (سبحانه وتعالى) taught us those matters. But because the Qur’ān is the summit of manners and eloquency, there's something called Kināyah. Kināyah is:

ذكر شيء بغير لفظه الموضوع له

Probably the best English (والله أعلم) definition of that is ‘euphemism’, or alluding, or hinting, or substituting – where you substitute a term with another, that’s not specific for that matter. And it’s used for many reasons.

Kināyah is used for many reasons. But I mention it, in the context that we’re talking about here which I'm trying to get at, which is being selective in how you present matters that may be bashful, in a setting of Talabat al-’Ilm [students of knowledge]. Look at the verse in the Qur’ān,

فَمَا اسْتَمْتَعْتُم بِهِ مِنْهُنَّ فَآتُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا تَرَاضَيْتُم بِهِ مِن بَعْدِ الْفَرِيضَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

So with those among them whom you have enjoyed, give them their required due, but if you agree mutually (to give more) after the requirement (has been determined), there is no sin on you. Surely, Allāh is Ever All-Knowing, All-Wise.[1]

“فَمَا اسْتَمْتَعْتُم بِهِ مِنْهُنَّ”, literally, that means ‘what you enjoy’ or ‘enjoyment’, with your spouse, with your wife. ‘Enjoyment’ here was used instead of intimitate sexual relationship between a husband and a wife. Instead of explicitly mentioning sexual intercourse, it was alluded to with mentioning enjoyment. “فَمَا اسْتَمْتَعْتُم بِهِ مِنْهُنَّ”. Another example:

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أُمَّهَاتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُكُمْ وَأَخَوَاتُكُمْ وَعَمَّاتُكُمْ وَخَالَاتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُ الْأَخِ وَبَنَاتُ الْأُخْتِ وَأُمَّهَاتُكُمُ اللَّاتِي أَرْضَعْنَكُمْ وَأَخَوَاتُكُم مِّنَ الرَّضَاعَةِ وَأُمَّهَاتُ نِسَائِكُمْ وَرَبَائِبُكُمُ اللَّاتِي فِي حُجُورِكُم مِّن نِّسَائِكُمُ اللَّاتِي دَخَلْتُم بِهِنَّ

Forbidden to you (for marriage) are: your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your father's sisters, your mother's sisters, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your foster mothers who suckled you, your foster milk suckling sisters, your wives' mothers, your stepdaughters under your guardianship, born of your wives unto whom you have gone in – but there is no sin on you if you have not gone in unto them (to marry their daughters)[2]

[1] [4:24]
[2] [4:23]

"اللَّاتِي دَخَلْتُم بِهِنَّ" literally means, entered upon them. The term 'entered upon them' was used instead of saying sexual relationship. Rather than mentioning intimate sexual relationship, Allāh said "اللَّاتِي دَخَلْتُم بِهِنَّ", 'entered upon them'. Another example (and the examples are many):

وَكَيْفَ تَأْخُذُونَهُ وَقَدْ أَفْضَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ وَأَخَذْنَ مِنكُم مِّيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا

And how could you take it (back) while you have gone in unto each other, and they have taken from you a firm and strong covenant[3]

"هو الجماع الإفضى". Afdā literally, linguistically in 'Arabi means, reaching one another without a barrier. الوصول إلى شيء من غير واسطة. Afdā is gone to each other, reached one another. Afdā was used instead of actual sexual intercourse, the term 'sexual intercourse'. Another one:

وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيًّا كَبِيرًا

As to those women on whose part you see ill conduct, admonish them, and abandon them in their beds, and beat them, but if they return to obedience, do not seek a means against them. Surely, Allāh is Ever Most High, Most Great.[4]

The verse pertaining to disputes between a husband and his wife. Allāh (سبحانه وتعالى) said, "وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ", leave them in bed alone, abandon them in bed. "وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ" (leave them alone in bed), that term, the way it's used, was substituted for sexual intercourse. Because the 'Ulamā' mentioned that in this level of difficulty between a husband and wife, he should be in the same bed with her, but not have sexual relationship. So abandoning them in bed was used instead of just sexual intercourse. Not really abandoning them, sleeping somewhere on the couch while she's on the bed.

[3] [4:21]
[4] [4:34]

The verse that we took many times in this class has two examples in it.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقْرَبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنتُمْ سُكَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا مَا تَقُولُونَ وَلَا جُنُبًا إِلَّا عَابِرِي سَبِيلٍ حَتَّىٰ تَغْتَسِلُوا وَإِن كُنتُم مَّرْضَىٰ أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِّنكُم مِّنَ الْغَائِطِ أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ

O you who believe! Do not approach Salāh while you are in a druken state until you know what you are saying, nor while Junub (sexually impure), except while passing through, until you bathe (your entire body), and if you are ill, or on a journey, or one of you comes from the Ghā'it (toilet), or from 'Lāmastum' (touching) women[5]

Ghā’it linguistically means the lower part of the earth. The ‘Arab used to go to the lower grounds to avoid higher grounds, when relieving themselves, so they wouldn't be seen. So they would go to the lower part of the earth. So Ghā’it in reality is a description of the place they used to relieve themselves. It was Kināyah, instead of saying actual defecating. And in the same verse, right after that, “أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِّنكُم مِّنَ الْغَائِطِ أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ”. In this class we took lāmastum. Lāmastum means to touch, contact. Touch or contact here in this verse refers to sexual relationship. Ibn ‘Abbās said,

الملامسة : الجماع ، ولكن الله كريم يكني بما يشاء.

Ibn ‘Abbās said, lāmastum: that term is sexual relationship, but Allāh is Karīm, who substitutes as He wishes.

And like that also is the verse of ‘Īsa and his mother (عليهم السلام),

مَّا الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ وَأُمُّهُ صِدِّيقَةٌ كَانَا يَأْكُلَانِ الطَّعَامَ

[5] [4:43]

The Messiah ['Īsa], son of Maryam, was no more than a Messenger; many were the Messengers that passed away before him. His mother [Maryam] was a Siddīqah. They both used to eat food.[6]

The verse is simply saying 'Īsa and his mother used to eat food. Eating food here is Kināyah that they used the bathroom, because it's from the essentials of eating that one uses the bathroom.

{كَانَا يَأْكُلاَنِ الطعام} كناية عن قضاء الحاجة, لأنّ أكل الطعام من لوازمه قضاء الحاجة

Also a description of the punishment of the Kuffār on their deathbed, in two verses,

فَكَيْفَ إِذَا تَوَفَّتْهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ

Then how (will it be) when the angels will take their souls at death, striking their faces and their backs[7]

The second one is,

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ يَتَوَفَّى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۙ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ

And if you could see when the angels take away the souls of those who disbelieve (at death); they smite their faces and their backs, (saying): "Taste the punishment of the blazing Fire.[8]

If only you could see when the angels take the souls of the disbelievers. 'Adbārahum' in both verses, which means 'backs' in 'Arabi, is a Kināyah here used instead of buttocks. As Mujāhid and other 'Ulamā' said.

[6] [5:75]
[7] [42:27]
[8] [8:50]

The Qur’ān is the word of Allāh, and it’s perfected in every way, and it's in the highest of all standards. And so we should learn its style in our speech, especially as Talabat ‘Ilm. We’re talking about the choice of words in the context of teaching bashful, or, well you may refer to it as “bashful Fiqh matters”. Why is alluding used in the Qur’ān? There's many reasons for that, but for our specific matter here, I'll mention a few. One of them is because it’s a bashful or reprehensible matter, or hideous matter – so it’s substituted. And I said if you can’t get the Fiqh issue or lesson clear, except through directly mentioning it, you should directly mention it. But if you can hint to it, that's good. Or if you can explicitly mention it the first time and then – because you're going to repeat in a class – after you explicitly mention it, then hint to it and allude to it. Also, a reason for the Kināyah in these matters in the Qur’ān is it could be an unpleasant topic like Ghā’it. And a third reason is because hinting is because the mind follows what the tongue recites or what the ears hear. A person reads the Qur’ān while he’s in a deep ‘ibādah status, in Salāh, in Khushū’, in the one third end of the night – trying to attain the deepest of Khushū’, trying to contemplate the meaning. One attempts to attain the deepest Khushū’ with the word of Allāh (سبحانه وتعالى). He tries to concentrate and understand the meaning. With the verses mentioned in hinting by Allāh (سبحانه وتعالى), you attain the same necessary understanding of the verse, without your mind wandering into something unnecessary that may take away from one’s Khushū’ or concentration. Had it been explicit sexual relationship that was mentioned, instead of lāmastum for example, the mind and heart would visualize what’s heard and read, and that may cause someone’s Khushū’ or his spiritual concentration to lessen. So the original term was substituted or hinted to by ‘Allām al-Ghuyūb. That’s the summit peak of manners and eloquency, and at times hinting like that is also more summarized.

وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم